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THE BRIGHTENING OF THREE DREARY BACK ROOMS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY E. H. FITCHEW.

OF the dull, cold dreariness of their aspect there could be no question. Outside, a few yards from the windows, the blank walls of a great manufactory shut out light and air, and took away all chance of the sun shining into those dark bogie-like corners and chasing the spiders away.

They were large rooms—that was the only thing I could say in their praise as I stood on the threshold, and wondered, with a terrible sinking of the heart, if I could ever bring myself to live in them.

If I had had one particle of choice I should not have gone there, but as it was, circumstances had ordained that it was to be my home, and I had to give myself up to making the best of it.

Now, had I possessed plenty of money, this “making the best” would not have been so very difficult; beautiful painted glass and Morris papers would have wrought wonders, and I should soon have had a pretty room; but money was not very plentiful with me just then, and I was obliged to count the cost of everything I ordered.

The first room was papered with an old-fashioned flock paper, dreadfully dark, in colors of brown and purple; it was

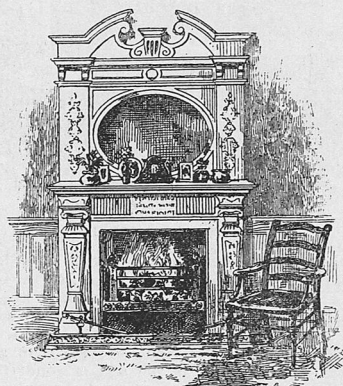


Considering the Situation.

very ugly, but, like many ugly things, was in wonderful preservation. I hardly liked to tear it down and have the walls scraped and another put up. I ought not to begin with an unnecessary expense. Then I remembered that I could paint it—the expense would be much less than a new paper, and the ef-

fect gained by painting on flock is exceedingly good; the pattern shows up under the paint in bold relief. Before we began to paint I bought some yards of Japanese gold paper at forty cents a yard, and some of the Lincrusta bordering. This bordering was nailed round the top of the room, just below the ceiling. The gold paper was cut into panels and was pasted upon the wall, great care having been first taken to tear off the flock paper beneath it; had this not been removed the surface of the wall would have been unequal. When the paper was thoroughly dry the painting began, the great question of the color having first been settled.

The color depended more upon the character of the room than upon individual taste and inclination. Had the room been



My Polished Pine Mantel-piece.

less cold and sunless, white walls and gold panels would have been beautiful, but under present circumstances I felt warmth must be the first consideration, so we fixed on a red, or rather a crimson lake, and when finished the choice was quite justified. The first coat was of white paint; it is always well in painting flock papers to use white for the first coat, as it prevents the colors of the flock taking away the brightness of the paint and it gives substance also to the Lincrusta border. Two coats of the crimson lake completed the work, and when some etchings in black and white frames were hung, the walls looked wonderfully well. The mantel-piece was a dreadful wooden one, painted to represent marble. I could have had it scraped and repainted, but I was extravagant enough to take it down and put up one of polished pine, which I illustrate here. The mantel-piece and overmantel are all made in one, a little mirror of beveled glass is let into the centre, while a motto is carved over the brass fire-place.

I bought a pierced brass fender for the room, costing nineteen and sixpence. The walls being finished, the carpet had to be considered, and this was an anxious question. A carpet to cover the floor was a difficult thing, and yet the boards were too old and worm eaten for polish and staining, and even could they be stained the color would not look well with my polished pine.

After a great deal of thought I ended by having no carpet at all. I had the floor covered with parquet flooring. This was laid upon the old boards and fitted tightly over the floor; it made a great difference to the warmth of the room, as it kept out the draughts which used to rush up between the cracks.

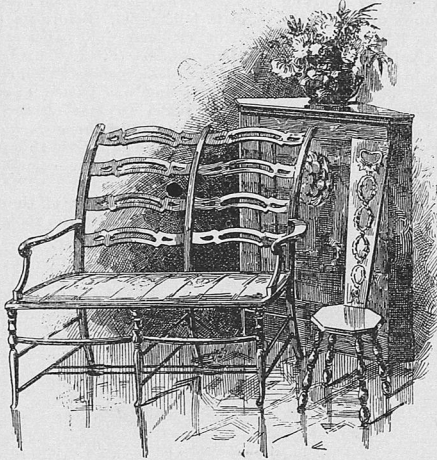
The parquet we had was of the thin kind and in light pol-

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

ished wood. A large Turkish rug, costing ten dollars, was put down in front of the fire-place, and looked very well.

But, though all this was an improvement, the black walls of the manufactory still stared in at the windows in hopeless ugliness. What could be done? Fine silk inner curtains would have been pretty, but on trying a piece of silk against the pane, I found that it darkened the already dark room too much to be a possibility. At last I remembered a device that I had once seen in a friend's house.

I hunted the shops through till I found some very fine muslin with a very large pattern. I succeeded in getting exactly



Settee and Oak Spinning Chair.

what I wanted—a pale cream ground, with a faded looking pattern of crimson flowers and leaves, edged, as in colored glass, with olive green; it was fifty inches wide, at fifteen cents a yard. This I pasted on all the lower part of the window; I had to exercise great care in keeping it quite straight. I used fish glue, as I found it whiter and much stronger than gum.

The effect of muslin used in this way is wonderful. As it is pasted tightly on the glass there are no folds, as in curtains, to obstruct the light; it does not soil for a very long time, and then it can be easily washed off with very hot water and a hard nail brush, and the glass can be re-covered. Over the top panes of these windows I pasted some dried fronds of ferns; the Royal and Bracken. I made them come from each side, and did not let them quite meet in the middle. They must be fastened on very carefully; each leaf should be lightly gummed down to the glass.

My windows looked very well when they were finished; but I have always found the top panes very difficult to keep clean, as it is so hard not to rub the dried ferns off.

For curtains I chose a very pretty "Art Tapestry." The ground was something the same color as my floor, and it was worked in stripes of gold, with flowers in crimson and pale pink. It was a very nice material and exceedingly cheap, as it was fifty-two inches wide and only cost forty cents a yard. I lined it with canvas the same color as the ground, as I was very anxious not to obstruct the light by anything dark.

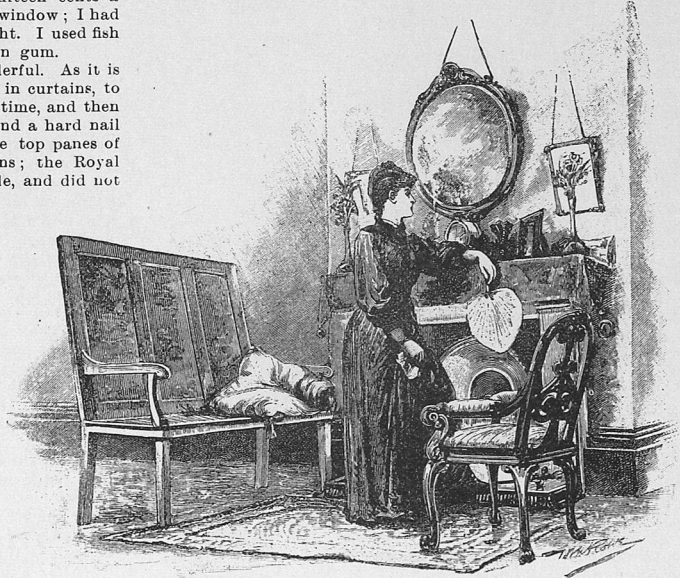
I used the tapestry I have described for covering the couch; it was an old one and I covered it myself. I found it easier first of all to take the pattern in paper, which I did by pinning newspapers all over it. When these fitted well, and were all right as to their seams, I laid them upon the material and cut out my patterns; after this the rest was easy work. I made a deep frill all round the bottom, but I find with tapestry it is best to plait instead of gathering it.

I will give some description of my new furniture; it was not expensive, but wonderfully strong and artistic. My oak spinning chair only cost four dollars, and is made from an old model two hundred years old. The Shakespeare oak chair is also a copy, while the settee and smaller chairs are quite modern, though very well designed. I am very proud of their seats, for I modelled them myself in the raised leather work, and I am told they will never wear out. I have a comfortable Indian rattan-cane rocking chair, for which I paid five dollars. As the room is used for a dining room, I had, of course, to buy a table. I ordered a deal one, with polished pine legs, and had to have it made. It has a round top and cost about twenty dollars. I use for a table-cloth one of the lovely Indian quilts, the colors of which look very well in my room. I could not pay the price required for a good sideboard, and would not have a common cheap one, so I had to go without one at all, and bought instead an oak table with two drawers, and beautifully carved, which I thought would serve the same purpose; it cost fifteen dollars. Of course this did not give a cupboard, but I found I could get a very pretty oak corner cupboard for ten dollars. So I had my sideboard accommodation for twenty-five dollars; and the corner cupboard, having two large roomy shelves, was useful for many things. The walls being so bright, the dark oak furniture in no sense served to make the room look gloomy. The light polished boards and the brass fire-place all gave color; and though I could hardly believe the evidence of my own eyes, it was true that, in spite of its dreary surroundings, the whole effect of the room when finished was one of brightness.

The drawing-room was almost, if possible, a more difficult task. It was smaller than the dining-room, but it looked so dark, and the paint was so worn, and so thick in dirt, that there seemed no hope of it ever looking even clean. It was easy enough to call in scrubbers and whitewashers—the hard part began after they had departed.

Now, when everything is done, and is so fairly successful, I wonder at the anxiety it cost me, though I know that if I had to do it all over again I should give just the same amount of serious thought to the subject.

I resolved to have the woodwork painted black. It was too old for a light color, which would have shown up the worn parts more than the black did. I had it highly varnished in-



My Drawing-room Fire-place.

stead of flatted, because I knew the polish would give brightness to the walls.

I chose a beautiful paper and a moderately inexpensive one; it was only sixty cents the piece. In color it was a canary yel-

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

low, with a well drawn rose pattern raised up in a darker shade. I believe these papers are called metallic; their surface is ribbed.

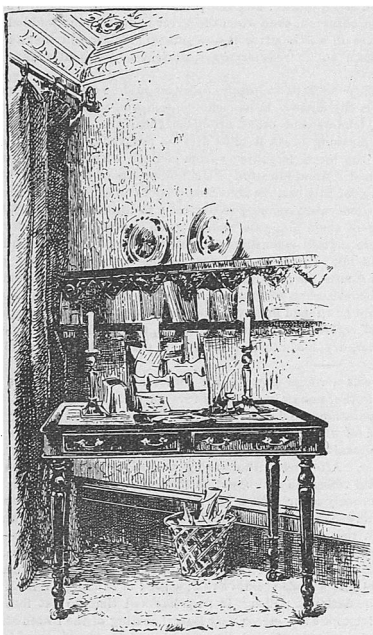
As the room was so dark, I had no curtains to darken the windows, though to prevent the room looking uncomfortable at night I put up a long brass pole, which ran all one length of the room, at the window end. To this pole I hung two very wide curtains, made of blue imperial plush, with a wide band of cross stitch about two feet wide. This was worked along the edge on very coarse canvas in thick gold thread, the canvas being afterwards pulled out.

These curtains were arranged to hang, not at the windows, but in each corner, and at night were drawn right across that end of the room. Over the windows came white silk curtains, which were only fastened from the top to the bottom of the sash. These gave light rather than took it away. The silk cost thirty-six cents a yard.

An old-fashioned round beveled glass, in an ebony frame, hung over the mantel-piece. It cost seven and a half dollars.

A long black shelf, as shown in the illustration, went the whole side of the room; it was made by a carpenter, stained and French-polished, and cost me four dollars.

I saved dollars by learning how to French-polish; it is not difficult when you know how to do it, but great care is wanted in the operation. Buy a bottle of the polish, and pour a very small quantity on the wood. After you have worked it very smooth with sand-paper, you rub round and round with a piece of soft silk till you feel the surface getting sticky; that means



My Writing-Table.

that more polish is required; you put it on and repeat the rubbing. This continues till the transparent effect of polishing is gained.

I have two beautiful inlaid arm-chairs. They are a revival of the Sheraton chairs, exquisite in design and of good workmanship, and would make beautiful presents.

The carpet is a dull, faded, blue-green, which is hardly a color it is so indistinct.

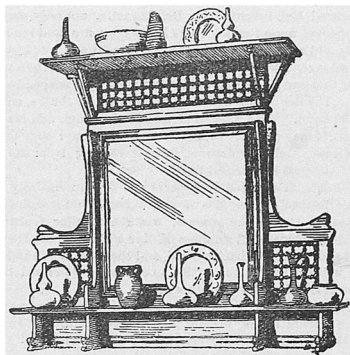
By the fire stands a good copy of the old-fashioned settle, made in stained deal with rush seats.

The couch is covered with a real Indian covering of a most ovely shade of dull red, embroidered all over in groups of white

and pale yellow flowers. It was made with a frill, which covered the legs of the couch. The edge of this frill was turned up with a lovely shade of green silk worked into the material.

It cost only ten dollars, and I got it from people who have always a stock of such things to sell in aid of Indian missions.

Almost my only other expense was having a long panel of looking glass framed in bamboo, and inserted between the two windows. It gave the much needed light to the room. My most useful article of furniture was perhaps too simple to mention—a writing table made out of an old dressing table. I had the legs shortened and screwed in castors, and after scrubbing it well with boiling water and soda, I gave it two coats of black enamel. When dry I bought some good brass handles and screwed them into the drawers, and covered the table with a piece of natural colored leather—or pigskin, rather. I did not



Moresque Overmantel.

put it quite over the table, but left an edge of six inches all round, which was colored with the black.

The cushions of my chairs are of different colors. Some are made of dark blue Roman satin, worked in gold cross stitch—others are of the gold printed Bolton sheeting and of dull red velvet.

I have one Ind'an table cloth, which gives color to the room, and somehow or other all things combined have produced a much better effect than I could have thought possible, and I hope, as time goes on, to make additions which will still improve it.

I bought a French paper for my bedroom, as I knew it would be gay, and yet not too light to require renewing almost directly. I found a very pretty one of bright flowers and gay knots of ribbon. I had all the woodwork painted chocolate brown and highly varnished.

I bought a set of furniture in ash for forty dollars, including a wardrobe with a glass door. And for ten dollars I got a black and brass French bedstead.

I covered two arm-chairs with a glazed chintz at forty cents a yard. It had a pattern very much like the paper, of roses tied with blue ribbon on a cream ground. Being glazed, it kept clean for a considerable time.

I put down instead of a carpet one of the new linoleums in plain terra cotta. These are from sixty cents to one dollar a square yard, and make a soft, clean covering for the floor.

The room had good shutters, so I only put up Venetian blinds, and used a folding screen in front of the shutters at night.—*Cassell's Family Magazine*.

SEPARATE center cloths of linen, with decorations more or less elaborate in fine needlework and drawn work are still well used. A favorite design for the centers used at the ladies' lunch is in Dresden work. The tiny flower sprays, like those on the china, scattered carelessly all over the piece, require great skill in the manipulation and faultless taste in their color combinations. These sprays are often copied from old Dresden bits by ladies clever in drawing their own designs, and in shading the silk with which the designs are carried out.